

**FLOOR STATEMENT ON THE
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION (LSC) FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

July 28, 2014

Mr. President, this past Friday, July 25, marked the 40th anniversary of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). In 1974, Congress enacted legislation with the signature of President Nixon that established LSC with bipartisan support. LSC is a private, nonprofit corporation, funded by Congress, with the mission to ensure equal access to justice under law for all Americans by providing civil legal assistance to those who otherwise would be unable to afford it. LSC distributes almost all of its annual Federal appropriations to 134 local legal aid programs, serving communities in every state.

In Maryland, according to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), services to clients in FY 2013 increased 5% from the prior year, with MLSC grantees opening nearly 168,000 new cases, a record high, and benefiting almost 252,000 individuals and families. Family cases, about one-third of all cases, involved domestic violence, child custody, child support, and other matters and benefited nearly 80,000 people. Foreclosures, evictions, and other housing cases, also almost one-third of cases, benefited approximately 94,000 individuals and families. Debt collection, bankruptcy, and other consumer cases, which are one-fifth of all cases, directly benefited 23,000 individuals and families. The private bar handled almost 8,000 cases through MLSC-funded organizations. Pro bono attorneys gave nearly 69,000 hours, representing almost \$19 million in donated legal services.

And finally, helping to leverage pro bono, the Judicare Project referred about 1,000 Judicare cases to nearly 500 reduced-fee attorneys that provided 22,000 hours of services, including at least 2,000 pro bono hours, which benefited 2,700 individuals and families.

Let me just give a few examples of the excellent work done by MLSC grantees over the last year as a result of the grants given by LSC. “Shirley” was thrilled to move into her new house in Baltimore County after nearly three years in a nursing facility with help from the Maryland Disability Law Center (MDLC). Shirley had a special voucher for non-elderly persons with disabilities who are transitioning from nursing homes to the community, but ran into obstacles finding the right place and location to meet her needs. MDLC’s Sunshine Folk, a group of advocates with disabilities who were formerly institutionalized, and MDLC’s housing lawyers helped Shirley get an extension of her voucher and a professional housing transition team, ensuring that her rights to reasonable accommodations were protected.

Several years ago, Kenneth Brown’s mother learned that her landlord was in foreclosure and that Fannie Mae wanted to evict her from her long-time Baltimore home. But through the Brown family’s persistence, Public Justice Center’s (PJC) legal advocacy, and the support of community organizing partners, Kenneth and his brother Berveyn were able to buy the home this year. Together, PJC and the Browns challenged multiple eviction attempts in court and demanded needed repairs. PJC community organizing partners also secured a meeting with Fannie Mae executives. The Browns avoided eviction and ultimately bought the house from Fannie Mae.

After visiting Baltimore Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services years ago for getting help obtaining her legal permanent residence (green card), “Jeannette” returned to apply for naturalization with the help of a volunteer attorney during one of ILS’s regular naturalization clinics, and was sworn in as a US citizen.

I remain concerned about the access to justice gap that still exists today. We must do better than turn away more than 50 percent of eligible clients who seek assistance because of the lack of LSC program resources. I support full funding of LSC’s budget request for FY ’15. I strongly support lifting unnecessary, burdensome, and counterproductive Congressional restrictions, such as restrictions on filing class action lawsuits and recovering attorneys’ fees. Congress should also remove restrictions on the use of non-LSC funds by LSC grantees.

I commend the LSC, MLSC, and the many LSC-funded attorneys and private sector lawyers who have donated pro bono hours who strive to live up to the commitment of our legal system to provide equal justice under law. Last week I attended a federal judicial investiture ceremony in Maryland, and the judge swore to “administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich.” Mr. President, Congress needs to live up to the same commitment that we require our federal judges to make before sitting on the bench and deciding cases. Let us make sure that millions of Americans who need access to legal assistance are provided that critical help in cases that will have a profound impact on their lives, their family, and their community.